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SUBJECT: RAIN AND FLOODING WASH OUT BRIDGE ON MAIN
NORTH/SOUTH CORRIDOR

11. SUMMARY: Regions of central and southern Togo have been experiencing heavy rainfall leading to loss of life, flooding and most recently the washing out of a strategic bridge on the main North/South road. Travelers between Lome and northern Togo and the Sahel states will need to build in extra time into their itineraries for the foreseeable future.
END SUMMARY.

General situation

12. Togo's rainy season this year has proven to be quite generous. Although nearing and end in the southern and central part of the country as it releases its precipitation on the North and in the Sahel, the rains have been diluvian in some parts of lower Togo since mid-month. There has been extensive damage in the city of Atakpame in central Togo, particularly in low lying areas where people have foolishly built homes, only to have flood waters sweep through them. In one nearby village four people died when lightening struck their house. Crop damage has been reported. The city of Vogan and surrounding areas in southeastern Togo have also been seriously affected, with television footage showing inhabitants standing in artificial lakes and stagnant water. Many inhabitants have been evacuated from their flooded homes. As rain water begins to dry up, more heavy rain has fallen, with rivers swelling beyond capacity.

Major thoroughfare cut

13. The most serious damage occurred July 27, when three days of rainfall washed out a bridge over the Haho river, some 85 kms north of Lome. The bridge was a strategic passage point on the main North/South road linking Lome to the Sahel countries, and a roaring river now passes through there instead. The Prime Minister and Minister of Territorial Administration visited the site the same day to inspect damage.

14. Until the bridge is rebuilt, all traffic going North from Lome towards Atakpame (and vice-versa) will be required to detour via Kpalime (120 kms northwest of Lome) and cut back towards Atakpame, north of the washed out bridge. The detour will take at least 1 1/2 hours to cover the additional 60 kms.

15. Togo's North/South corridor, known as the gateway to the Sahel, is a major strategic/economic axis not only for Togo, but also for Burkina-Faso, Mali and Niger. Many imported goods arrive via the ports of Cotonou and Lome and are trucked north to the Sahel countries. Gasoline and cement are also hauled by truck from Lome towards the North via that roadway. The detour via Kpalime will not only lengthen the time it takes to reach Atakpame, but will most likely also causes traffic jams throughout the detour area. The road north via Kpalime is not built to accommodate massive truck, container and passenger traffic -- using it for a lengthy

period of time may cause serious damage to that road and may also result in serious traffic accidents. The GOT is especially afraid the small bridges along the detour route may not be able to support the heavy trucks for long.

Emergency meeting

¶6. Prime Minister Mally held an emergency meeting July 28 to discuss the situation and decide on how best to address the washed out bridge. The GOT considers the bridge situation as "very serious" and is preoccupied by the economic ramifications of halted or decreased truck traffic to the North. One participant told us that one important concern is that if direct access to the North is not restored quickly, then food and goods distributors might profit from the situation and drastically hike up prices. With the already tense climate surrounding Togo food and fuel prices, fear was expressed that it could have dire consequences on the welfare of the Togolese population.

¶7. The ministers decided to solicit construction company bids for the strengthening of an existing metal railroad bridge 3 kms east of the washed out bridge. Interested construction companies will be given the opportunity to travel to the site today and will be required to submit a bid to the Ministry of Transportation within 24 hours. Ideally, a company will be selected on July 29 and work on the railroad bridge would begin at the end of the week. This bridge, once solidified and converted to allow road traffic, would be a one-way thruway with an alternating traffic pattern allowing traffic from the North and from the South to cross over the river.

¶8. The GOT is also seeking assistance in acquiring a prefabricated 80 meter bridge to quickly replace the one washed out thus enabling the resumption of normal traffic to and from the North within a few months.

¶9. COMMENT: Unless a solution can be found quickly, all travel north will be severely affected for the foreseeable future. Persons planning to travel to the coast from the interior need to factor in several additional hours for any trip southward.

TWINING